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Improving the effectiveness of the methods of work of the First Committee

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Report of the Secretary-General

Addendum**

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* A/59/150.
** This information was received after submission of the main report.

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II. Replies received from States

Russian Federation

[Original: Russian]
[8 August 2004]

1. The Russian Federation attaches considerable importance to improving the effectiveness of the methods of work of the First Committee of the General Assembly, both in the context of the functioning of the United Nations system as a whole and as a part of the international mechanisms dealing with the issues of multilateral disarmament and international security. As one of the Main Committees of the General Assembly, whose terms of reference relate to political and security questions (including arms control), it is a universal international body for matters concerning disarmament and security, in which all the States Members of the United Nations are represented on an equal footing.

2. It is necessary to maintain the First Committee's role as a major body in which the questions of multilateral disarmament and international security are discussed. Problems relating to the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery, including the danger of their falling into the hands of terrorists, should be stressed in its work. It is important to continue to focus attention on such matters as preventing an arms race in outer space and enhancing the security of information and telecommunication technologies.

3. The work of optimizing the activities of the First Committee must become part of the broader process of reforming the United Nations, including improving the work of the General Assembly and its main bodies. The effort to reform the Committee's methods of work is not an end in itself. It must be in keeping with the main task — adapting the United Nations to the threats and challenges of international security in the twenty-first century.

4. General Assembly resolution 58/126 on the revitilization of the work of the General Assembly sets forth a number of essential provisions relating to the work of the Main Committees, including, inter alia, election of the Chairmen of the Main Committees at least three months before the opening of the session. The task of improving the effectiveness of the work of the First Committee must be carried out in close coordination with similar work in the other Main Committees of the General Assembly. At the same time, discussions in various forums conducted on the question of improving the organization of the First Committee's work contribute to reforming the entire United Nations system.

5. In the opinion of the Russian Federation, the process of improving the effectiveness of the methods of work of the First Committee must be based on such principles as prudence, maintaining the procedural bases for its activities, respect for the equal right of each State to express its views and defend its interests. In this connection, any practical steps should preferably be agreed through consensus. In the course of the reforms, which are seen as a process and not as a single measure, the right of States sponsoring draft resolutions to deal with them as they see fit cannot be called into question directly or indirectly.

6. Proposals concerning a mechanical reduction (to three weeks) of the length of the Committee's sessions seem unconvincing. In view of the fact that approximately

50 resolutions and decisions are traditionally adopted in the course of the First Committee's work, their preparation will in fact be made more difficult if the time is reduced. At the same time, more effective use of consultations on the part of the co-sponsors of draft resolutions during the pre-sessional period would help to enhance the quality of the debate during the Committee's work.

7. The Russian Federation would be ready to support a consensus on proposals for a relative reduction of the time allotted for the general debate in the schedule of meetings of the First Committee and for increasing the time for the debate on specific items, the further introduction of a two- or three-day "interactive segment" with the participation of representatives of Governments and non-governmental organizations, and the use of a constantly updated list of speakers in the debate on specific agenda items in order to utilize fully the time at each meeting. Within the framework of making best use of the agenda, the practice of transferring the consideration of individual draft resolutions to a two- or three-year cycle has proved to be a positive one. At the same time, the possibility of such a practice must be considered first and foremost by the co-sponsors themselves with regard to each specific resolution. Developing the approved practice of delegations making statements in explanation of vote with regard to thematic clusters of draft resolutions and also the proposal to group agenda items allocated for consideration by the First Committee according to the same thematic clusters do not give rise to objections.

8. The process of improving the effectiveness of the methods of work of the First Committee must not be a one-time effort; in this connection, each elected chairman of the Committee could put forward general conclusions relating to his experience in dealing with the reform and gather assessments and proposals by States with regard to rationalizing the work of this forum and improving its methods of work.

India

[Original: English]
[2 September 2004]

1. India has an unwavering commitment to multilateralism and to promoting and strengthening the role of multilateral institutions. India fully supports reforms in the United Nations system, including making the Security Council a more representative body and enhancing the authority and role of the General Assembly and its Main Committees.

2. The First Committee of the General Assembly is the only universal forum that deals with disarmament and related international security issues. Together with the Conference on Disarmament, the sole multilateral negotiating forum for disarmament and arms control matters, and the United Nations Disarmament Commission, the only global forum for deliberations on disarmament and arms control issues, it constitutes the triad of the multilateral disarmament machinery.

3. The First Committee provides the Member States of the United Nations with a forum in which to outline their views on various disarmament, arms control and international security issues that concern them and to learn from other Member States about their views, concerns and priorities. Moreover, it serves the purpose of seeking common ground and reaching consensus or a convergence of views on

various issues through general and thematic debate and the resolutions submitted by Member States. Any lack of consensus on various resolutions only demonstrates divergence in the perceptions, positions and priorities of the Member States on international security issues. The presentation of certain resolutions year after year demonstrates the importance attached to the issue by the interested Member States and enables them and others to reaffirm their positions. Changes in voting patterns of the Member States reflect the evolution in their views on international security issues.

4. Several efforts to enhance the effectiveness of the First Committee have been taken in the past. It has played its role effectively, within the limitations inherent in any multilateral process. While there is always room for improvement in the effectiveness of the methods of work of the First Committee, we need to preserve the strengths of its current methods of work. Reform of the First Committee must be carried out as an integral element of the overall reform process within the United Nations and should contribute to the larger goal of the revitalization of the General Assembly, including all its Main Committees.

5. It is for Member States to take decisions on tabling resolutions on any topics of the agenda, based on their concerns and priorities. No restriction should be placed on their sovereign right by stipulating any specific criteria for introducing resolutions. There should be no limitation on the freedom of the Member States to act in accordance with their security interests, including to speak on any topic of interest or to submit resolutions on any issue of concern to them.

6. The role of the Chairman and the Bureau of the Main Committees, including the First Committee, is defined under the rules of procedure of the General Assembly. It may be prudent to avoid enlarging the role of the Chair in identifying topics, planning or prioritizing the agenda and taking decisions on the consideration of resolutions or decisions. It is up to the Member States to take decisions on the issues they wish to raise in the general or thematic debates.

7. Furthermore, there is a need to avoid adopting measures that may cause divisions among Member States and make working methods more bureaucratic. In taking decisions on reforms, the criteria of their equal applicability and their impact on each State should be taken into account and all decisions should be adopted by consensus.

8. The General Assembly adopted, on 13 July 2004, resolution 58/316 on further measures for the revitalisation of the work of the General Assembly, which takes into account the views expressed as well as the suggestions made by Member States in the context of the deliberations of the open-ended meetings of the General Committee during the fifty-eighth session.

9. The resolution contains decisions, inter alia, on the working methods of the Main Committees, including the First Committee, and review of the agenda of the General Assembly. Those measures should guide the deliberations within the First Committee during the fifty-ninth session. The resolution underlines that any decisions to be taken by the First Committee in accordance with its recommendations should be adopted by consensus.

10. Any discussion on the existing disarmament agenda and the role of disarmament machinery comprising the First Committee, the Conference on Disarmament and the United Nations Disarmament Commission should be based on

an open, democratic and transparent process. In this context, there is already on the table a proposal to convene the fourth special session of the General Assembly devoted to Disarmament (SSOD-IV) to review and assess the implementation of the objectives and agenda set by SSOD-I and to set the agenda for the future, taking into account both the persistent and new security threats. India is willing to engage in a meaningful and productive debate on this subject and remains committed to contributing constructively to the process in order to strengthen the role of the General Assembly and the effectiveness of its work.

Romania

[Original: English]
[10 September 2004]

1. Romania welcomes the efforts to reform the working methods and practices of the First Committee in order to increase its efficiency and relevance. This issue should be addressed in the framework provided by General Assembly resolution 58/126 of 19 December 2003, which sets the context for revitalization of the General Assembly and improvement of its main Committees' working methods.

2. Romania shares the view that the rationalization of the work of the First Committee is necessary in order to enhance its capacity to address properly the present security issues. We highly appreciate the practical measures proposed by the Chairman of the Committee and those put forward by the European Union.

3. Romania believes that more time should be allotted to address problems of actuality and to discuss non-consensual issues in order to reach an agreement. The following concrete formal measures could contribute to a most effective use of the time allotted:

- Shortening the general debate. Romania agrees with the opinion that the general debate should be allotted no more than one week and that it should focus on the analysis of the international situation in the field of disarmament and non-proliferation. This would be possible by limiting the speaking time per individual delegation and by making greater use of the possibility to distribute longer written versions of the national statements.
- The concentration of the agenda by clustering the items that refer to the same subject for a common debate. Romania believes that it is necessary for the items retained to reflect the thematic content of the Committee.
- The greater use of the biennial and triennial submission of resolutions. Romania shares the view that the automatic inclusion of the same items every annual session of the General Assembly should be reconsidered.
- The limitation of the number of decisions and resolutions to be adopted in the First Committee. A maximum number of items could be established; if there are more issues to be discussed, they could be ranked according to their importance and actuality.
- The limitation of the number of reports initiated by the First Committee.
- A greater use of decisions instead of resolutions.

4. Romania believes that in terms of the organization of the Committee (administrative measures), the following measures could contribute to increase its efficiency:

- The election of the Chair and the Bureau of the First Committee at least three months in advance of each session of the General Assembly.
- Promoting among participants in the First Committee such principles as respecting the time schedule, punctuality, the search of consensus and the use of a rolling list of speakers.
- Coordination with other bodies and organisms of the United Nations to avoid duplication of work (important when setting the agenda).

5. Romania shares the view that substantial changes are also needed in order to enhance the relevance of the First Committee. We welcome the suggestion to invite relevant disarmament experts from civil society and academia or NGOs to take part in the thematic deliberations.